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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000335

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SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO INTERPELLATION OF PRIME MINISTER
ALEXIS

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 320

[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 106

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (SBU)Summary: The interpellation of Prime Minister (PM) Jacques Edouard Alexis by the House of Deputies on February 28 has strongly divided public opinion. Elite opinion is warning of the politically destabilizing effect a vote of no confidence. The informal sector and peasant groups, the hardest hit by the current economic hardship, are clamoring for his dismissal. Despite publicly voicing his readiness to defend his government in Parliament on February 28, PM Alexis has been privately jawboning Deputies to halt the interpellation or vote in his favor. Allegations that the PM Alexis is bribing Deputies for their votes have also surfaced. President Preval continues to play neutral, although he has publicly stated that Haiti's future development demands political stability. PM Alexis will be the third PM since the fall of the Duvaliers to be subjected to a parliamentary interpellation. We expect he will survive it, but he will have to devote more attention and energy to reviving the economy in its wake. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The interpellation of PM Alexis on February 28 has left public opinion strongly divided. Concerned with the potentially destabilizing effect a vote of no confidence would have on the GoH (ref A), influential sectors of Haitian society are cautioning the Deputies against such a vote and requesting the PM be given a reprieve while he works to curb the current economic hardship. Jean Robert Argant, President of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIH), cautioned the House of Deputies on February 19 against a vote of no confidence. Argant claimed a vote of no confidence would be "catastrophic" and would return Haiti both economically and politically to the "starting line."

[1](#)3. (U) The Civil Society Initiative (ISC), a grouping of twenty private sector and civil society organizations, stated February 21 that given the current economic hardship due to the rise in the cost of living, the Deputies had the right to exercise their constitutional prerogative in convoking PM Alexis. However, ISC Executive Director Rosny Desrosches cautioned that a vote of no confidence is "unwarranted." He proposed that the Chamber of Deputies grant PM Alexis and his government a three month reprieve, allowing the PM to institute feasible measures to alleviate the current economic plight. Influential Archbishop of Jacmel, Guyre Poulard, on February 19 publicly congratulated the Deputies

interpellation initiative but expressed no opinion on a vote of no confidence. He reminded the population that the Deputies have a constitutional prerogative to convoke the PM and the present economic hardship necessitated use of that constitutional prerogative. The Archbishop, however, pleaded with the Deputies to treat the PM respectfully during the interpellation.

¶4. (U) Grass roots organizations have tried to keep the focus on the current economic situation and not the actual interpellation of PM Alexis. Chavannes Jean Baptiste, the President of Peasant Movement of Papaye (Mouvement des Paysans des Papaye/MPP, a grass roots organization concentrated in the Center, Northwest and Artibonite Departments) told Poloff on February 26 that MPP was unconcerned with the outcome of PM Alexis' interpellation. Chavannes opined that a vote of no confidence and a replacement of M Alexis did not guarantee any change in the present economy. The focus, Chavannes stated, should be on a GoH policy to stimulate "national production" to reduce prices and encourage the peasants/farmers to continue farming.

¶5. (U) The labor movement is strongly divided on PM Alexis' interpellation. The Haitian Trade Union Coordination (Coordination Syndicale Haitienne-CSH), publicly state their opposition to the interpellation of PM Alexis on February 26. (Note: CSH is the largest regrouping of trade unions in the country with members from the garment, automotive, education and agricultural sectors. End note.) Napoleon Carlo, Secretary General of CSH, informed Poloff on February 26 that

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despite the current economic hardship, CSH believed the interpellation and possible vote of no confidence against PM Alexis would aggravate the economic climate. According to Carlo, CSH would rather the Deputies spearhead a cabinet reshuffle, with the Ministers of Agriculture (Francois

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Severin), Commerce and Industry (Maguy Durce), and Social Affairs (Gerald Germain) potential targets, as opposed to plunging the country into a new crisis with a vote of no confidence.

¶6. (U) The second largest regrouping of trade unions, Haitian Syndicate Platform (Plateforme Syndicale Haitienne-PSH), has taken the opposite view. PSH General Coordinator Gesner Milcent told Poloff on February 26 that PSH supported the interpellation and were pushing for their elected representatives to support a vote of no confidence. Milcent opined that PM Alexis' entire government should be dismissed for its failed performance in the past two years. Milcent dismissed as "ludicrous" the claim that a vote of no confidence would destabilize the GoH and worsen the economic situation. In his opinion, the current Alexis administration's ineffectiveness in providing basic needs to the populace is in of itself "criminal," and PM Alexis' lack of concern for the worsening economic conditions has already irreparably destabilized the GoH.

¶7. (U) PM Alexis' interpellation has also divided student groups. On February 21, the more prominent student groups from the State University of Haiti (student groups from the Faculties of Ethnology, Law and Agronomy) came out in support for the interpellation and the PM's subsequent dismissal. On February 28, seven other student groups called for the Deputies to halt the interpellation to prevent a political and economic crisis. These groups proposed that Deputies form multi-sector commissions to address the country's numerous problems, rather than issue a vote of no confidence.

¶8. (C) In public, PM Alexis has stated his readiness to answer the interpellation and defend his government before the Chamber of Deputies. In conversations with Ambassador,

WHA DAS Madison, and others, he has been confident he will defeat the interpellation. In private, PM Alexis has been maneuvering to convince individual Deputies to change their position. As late as Feb 27, PM Alexis was still scheduling individual meetings with Deputies. Deputy Sorel Francois (Fanmi Lavalas/FL, West) (protect accordingly) informed Poloff February 28 that PM Alexis met with FL Deputies and FL Senator Rudy Heriveaux the evening of February 27, upon the initiative of FL Senator. Francois further alleged that PM bribed FL Deputies with checks of 600,000 Haitian Gourdes (approximately USD 16,000) each and additionally, promised then 3 million Haitian Gourdes (approximately USD 80,000) for projects in their respective communities. Francois declared that he has refused to be bought off by PM Alexis and alleged that both he and President of the House of Deputies, Eric Jean Jacques (Lespwa, West) had received several death threats from supporters of the PM.

19. (U) Comment: Though the interpellation is nominally about the rising cost of living, the divided state of public opinion has revealed a myriad of other reasons for dissatisfaction with the Preval administration: the general lack of economic improvement under the Preval/Alexis administration, general public disillusionment with elected representatives, and corruption. If PM Alexis survives this interpellation, as we expect he will, his government will have to concentrate anew on economic programs that visibly benefit the economically disadvantaged majority.

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